

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 IO-14 SAM-01 SAB-01 OMB-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SR-02 ORM-03

DRC-01 /139 W

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R 121311Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3118

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 3904

LONDON FOR GLEYSTEN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IS

SUBJ: INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE: PROSPECTS FOR NATIONAL
RELIGIOUS PARTY JOINING COALITION

1. SUMMARY. APPARENTLY SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS BY ISRAELI CHIEF
RABBI OVER PAST FEW WEEKS TO FIND COMPROMISE FORMULA ON
WHO IS A JEW ISSUE HAVE LED TO INCREASED SPECULATION THAT
NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY (NRP) WILL IN NEAR FUTURE JOIN COALITION.
WHILE LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP IS ANXIOUS TO SEE BROADENED COALITION,
DIFFICULTIES LOOM AHEAD IN VIEW OF APPARENTLY DETERMINED OPPOSITION
BY MAPAM, INDEPENDENT LIBERAL PARTY (ILP) AND CITIZENS
RIGHTS MOVEMENT (CRM) TO ANY SIGNIFICANT CONCESSIONS ON
RELIGIOUS ISSUES. RABIN THUS FACES CHALLENGE OF AVERTING DOMESTIC
POLITICAL CRISIS WHILE SEEKING TO EXPAND BASIS OF GOVERNMENT
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COALITION. NRP RETURN COULD COMPLICATE GOI DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

RE POSSIBLE EARLY OPENING OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH JORDAN BUT WOULD NOT NECESSARILY BLOCK SUCH A DEVELOPMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. NRP REFUSAL LAST MAY TO JOIN RABIN GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN LARGELY BASED ON POSITION TAKEN BY RABBINATE UNDER LEADERSHIP OF CHIEF RABBI SHLOMO GOREN THAT LAW OF RETURN BE AMENDED TO SPECIFY THAT ONLY RECOGNIZED CONVERSIONS TO JUDAISM ARE THOSE MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ORTHODOX PROCEDURES (HALACHA). ALTHOUGH NRP HAD IGNORED RABBINATE'S VIEWS WHEN IT HAD JOINED LAST MEIR GOVERNMENT IN MARCH (A DECISION WHICH IT ATTRIBUTED TO SECURITY SITUATION ON GOLAN HEIGHTS), INCREASED DISSENSION WITHIN NRP OVER VARIETY OF ISSUES PRECLUDED ITS JOINING RABIN GOVERNMENT. WHEN RABIN FORMED 61-MEMBER COALITION, HE LEFT DOOR OPEN TO NRP RETURN BY RESERVING THREE CABINET SEATS AND PROMISING TO REVIEW WHO IS A JEW ISSUE AFTER THREE MONTHS.

3. ACCELERATED EFFORTS DURING PAST WEEKS TO RESOLVE CRITICAL RELIGIOUS ISSUE WERE MOTIVATED BY SEVERAL FACTORS: (A) RECOGNITION BY NRP THAT RABIN GOVERNMENT, DESPITE ONE VOTE MAJORITY IN KNESSET, PROBABLY COULD SURVIVE WITHOUT NRP GIVEN CONSOLIDATION OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR NEW GOVERNMENT; (B) LOSS OF NRP'S POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND PATRONAGE INCURRED BY STAYING OUT OF GOVERNMENT, AND (C) DESIRE BY RABIN TO INCREASE KNESSET MAJORITY, TO APPEAR TO BALANCE MORE DOVISH ELEMENTS IN CABINET AND TO AVERT POSSIBILITY OF NRP FORMING PERMANENT OPPOSITION BLOC WITH LIKUD AT SOME FUTURE DATE, ENDANGERING LABOR'S HEGEMONY IN ISRAELI POLITICAL LIFE.

4. RABBI GOREN HAS BEEN AT CENTER OF EFFORTS TO SEEK COMPROMISE ON RELIGIOUS ISSUE. GOREN'S RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH ORTHODOX RABBIS IN US, AND REPORTED INFORMAL CONTACTS BETWEEN LABOR AND NRP LEADERS HAVE NOW PRODUCED WAVE OF OPTIMISM THAT ACCEPTABLE COMPROMISE FORMULA IS IN SIGHT. CRUX OF REPORTED COMPROMISE IS THAT CONVERSIONS WILL BE RECOGNIZED ACCORDING TO CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF JEWISH PEOPLE AS PASSED ON FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION, RATHER THAN SPECIFIC STIPULATION OF "HALACHA." VAGUE WORDING IS THUS OPEN TO INTERPRETATION WHICH MAY SATISFY THE RABBIS, THE NRP, AND GREAT MAJORITY OF CURRENT COALITION MEMBERSHIP.

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5. MOVES TO SEEK FORMULA PERMITTING RETURN OF NRP HAVE CAUSED ALARM AMONG JUNIOR COALITION PARTNERS--MAPAM, INDEPENDENT LIBERALS AND CITIZENS RIGHTS MOVEMENT. LABOR PARTY LEADERS HAVE MADE REASSURING STATEMENTS THAT NRP'S JOINING COALITION WILL NOT BE AT EXPENSE OF PRESENT COALITION MEMBERS. HOWEVER LABOR'S PARTNERS HAVE EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO CONCESSIONS ON RELIGIOUS ISSUES AND HAVE WARNED THAT THEY MAY QUIT COALITION. COALITION LEADERS

MEETING JULY 15 TO DISCUSS PROPOSALS FOR NRP'S JOINING GOVERNMENT.

6. DESPITE RECENT ACCELERATED EFFORTS TO PAVE WAY FOR NRP RETURN, NEGOTIATIONS MAY BE PROTRACTED AS RESULT OF TENSIONS WITHIN RULING COALITION. RABIN THUS FACES TEST OF HIS POLITICAL SKILLS IN TRYING TO BROADEN COALITION WHILE AT SAME TIME AVERTING RIFT WITH PRESENT PARTNERS. PROSPECTS OF DEFUSING MAPAM AND INDEPENDENT LIBERAL OPPOSITION ARE MORE FAVORABLE THAN CHANCES OF PLACATING CITIZENS RIGHTS MOVEMENT. EVEN IF CRM SHOULD QUIT, ENLARGED COALITION WOULD REPRESENT NET GAIN OF SEVEN SEATS IN KNESSET (68 INSTEAD OF 61).

7. INCREASED COALITION MAJORITY WOULD EASE RABIN'S PROBLEM IN KNESSET OF ASSURING PASSAGE OF DOMESTIC LEGISLATION AND IN COPING WITH RANGE OF PROBLEMS IN RESTRAINING INFLATIONARY FORCES IN ECONOMY. HOWEVER, AS EVIDENCED IN PAST WEEKS, ONE-VOTE MAJORITY HAS BEEN ADEQUATE TO PASS KEY LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMS, DESPITE PHYSICAL STRAIN OF MOBILIZING KNESSET MEMBERS TO BE PRESENT FOR VOTING.

8. NRP'S ENTRY INTO COALITION WOULD, HOWEVER, GIVE GOVERNMENT MORE HAWKISH TONE ON FOREIGN POLICY--A GOAL FAVORED BY MORE HARDLINE ELEMENTS OF LABOR PARTY BUT OPPOSED BY OTHERS IN LABOR AS WELL AS BY MAPAM, ILP AND CRM. DESPITE ATTENTION FOCUSED ON RELIGIOUS ISSUES, A KEY PLANK IN NRP PLATFORM IS OPPOSITION TO RETURN OF ANY PART OF THE WEST BANK, AND PREFERENCE FOR NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT INCLUDING LIKUD. NRP'S RETURN TO GOVERNMENT COULD COMPLICATE PROSPECTS FOR POSSIBLE EARLY ISRAEL-JORDAN NEGOTIATIONS ON FUTURE OF WEST BANK ALTHOUGH IT WOULD NOT NECESSARILY CONSTITUTE A BARRIER TO THEM. RABIN'S DILEMMA WOULD BE TO FIND WAY TO RECONCILE HIS COMMITMENT TO PRINCIPLE OF TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE TO ACHIEVE PEACE SETTLEMENTS WITH MORE RIGID NRP POSITION ON WEST BANK.

VELIOTES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR, COALITION GOVERNMENT, POLITICAL SITUATION, POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY FACTIONS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, PARTY ALLIANCE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 JUL 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: martinml
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974TELAV03904
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740187-0109
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740752/aaaabsdz.tel
Line Count: 146
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: martinml
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 JUN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <25 JUN 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <26 FEB 2003 by martinml>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE: PROSPECTS FOR NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY JOINING COALITION
TAGS: PINT, IS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005